

Australian Journal of Teacher Education

Volume 38 | Issue 9

Article 4

9-2013

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Recommended Citation

Altun, T. (2013). Exploring the Effects of Classroom Culture on Primary Pre-Service Teachers' Professional Development. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(9).
<https://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n9.6>

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol38/iss9/4>

Exploring the Effects of Classroom Culture on Primary Pre-Service Teachers' Professional Development

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Abstract: This study aims to examine primary student teachers' (PSTs) perceptions about the effects of pre-formed classroom culture on their professional development. In the study, a mixed method approach was used. The study group consisted of 4th year student teachers who attend a primary teacher education program leading to a B.Ed. degree at the Fatih Faculty of Education at Karadeniz Technical University. The data was collected during the spring semester of the 2011-2012 academic year, in which student teachers carried out their teaching practices in primary schools. The main data collection instruments included a preliminary questionnaire which was distributed to 178 student teachers, and a semi-structured interview. Fifteen randomly selected students were interviewed. Results indicate that pre-established classroom culture have various effects on student teachers' professional development. Despite the presence of good teaching practices, within the pre-created climate of classrooms, limited integration with all aspects of classroom management such as communication with pupils, creating and maintaining routines, and establishing authority was reported. It is suggested that student teachers should be given more flexibility, time, or some degree of freedom in classrooms in order to convey their teaching skills and abilities to pupils for the betterment of their professional development.

Introduction

The growing body of literature on teacher professional development suggests that having both quality initial teacher education and a coherent process of continuous professional development to keep teachers up to date with the skills required in a knowledge based society is a necessity (OECD, 2010). It is emphasized that the level of teachers' educational attainment is a combination of their pre-service training and additional qualifications they may have acquired in-service. It is clearly documented that the quality of teachers' initial education is critical in shaping their work once they begin teaching in schools and should influence their further education and training requirements and other aspects of their development. Inadequate initial training may increase teachers' need for professional development once they enter the profession (OECD, 2009, p. 28).

During initial education, teaching practice is a critical component in the professional preparation of pre-service teachers to establish practices they will use in future settings (Grove, Strudler & Odell, 2004, p. 85). Contemporary studies reveal that teaching practice as part of the pre-service education of teachers is a great opportunity for student teachers to convey their pedagogical skills and expertise in real classroom environments (Tok, 2010; Sirmacı, 2010; Shadid & Hussain, 2011; Gorgoretti & Pilli, 2012; Yeşilyurt & Semerci, 2012; Liakopoulou, 2012; Adoniou, 2013). Teaching practices provide student teachers with opportunities to reflect and employ their theoretical knowledge in concrete educational

settings. In other words, teaching practice is a bridge between theoretical knowledge and practice (Albayrak, Berber & Özkan, 2005; Ekiz, 2006a; Shadid & Hussain, 2011). In this sense, it can be said that teaching practice plays a vital role in the professional development of prospective teachers (Shadid & Hussain, 2011). In Turkey, as elsewhere, teaching practice is considered a compulsory and core component of a teacher education program and regulated by the Ministry of National Education's 1998 directive (MEB, 1998).

The literature also emphasizes that involvement of student teachers in the teaching community in school classrooms is a dynamic process where constant mutual interaction and communication take place between student teachers, the teaching community, and pupils in classrooms. On the other hand, teaching practice in schools is complex, interactive, dynamic and idiosyncratic in nature and generally influenced by the interplay between individual and contextual variables. According to Cabrera and La Nasa (2008, p. 17), "*classroom experiences include exposure to teaching methods, the curriculum, and the classroom climate emerging by the nature of interactions among peers and with faculty. It is presumed that students' characteristics, teaching practices and classroom climate have a unique contribution on student development, reinforcing one another*". In addition to this, pre-service teachers' personal characteristics and resources, the quality of learning experiences, the supervisors' support and the quality of the school environment have been reviewed as the other main variables which affect student teachers' professional development during their teaching practices in schools (Caires & Almeida, 2005:112).

It is stressed that supervisor teachers' (mentors) support is one of the vital elements of teaching practice. Hobson (2002) points out that it is imperative that schools and teacher-mentors acknowledge student teachers' need for personal support and a safe environment within which they can work and learn. Due to the complexity of teaching (Ekiz 2006a) itself and the classroom environment, learning to teach can be a difficult, stressful and threatening experience (Tickle, 1991). In fact, previous studies report limited provision of professional support for student teachers in schools (Zanting, Verloop & Vermunt, 2001; Çimer & Çimer 2002; Ekiz, 2006b; Yeşil & Çalışkan, 2006).

Apart from the quality of mentoring, the school environment (ethos, climate, culture) is seen as one of the crucial factors which influence student teachers' personal and professional development. In this vein, Caires, Almeida and Vieira (2012, p. 2) remarked that in teaching processes, student teachers make continuous attempts to acknowledge, interpret and give meaning to routines, values, resources and communication patterns in order to gradually integrate into the school ethos. School culture at this point is an important element of the quality of the school environment which influences all staff and teachers' professional development. Every school has its own culture and it is known that the ethos of schools may also differ widely. It is for this reason that the application of theory to practice does not always have the same outcome. The uniqueness of school contexts plays a substantial role in this process, as schools are perceived differently by students, teachers, principals, parents and communities (Altun, 2006). School climate is also an important aspect of both the working lives of school principals and teachers and of the education provided to students, which has the potential to influence student attainment and learning. For example, an analysis of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) data showed that a positive school climate was associated with higher levels of student achievement (OECD, 2004). A positive school climate can also have a positive impact on teachers and their working lives, just as a positive organizational climate can benefit employees, increase their job satisfaction and affect their productivity (Lazear, 2000, cited in OECD, 2009, p. 39). In teaching education practices, effects of context on teaching and learning practices of pre-service teachers should be understood in order to sustain effective professional development (Fenwick & Cooper, 2013).

It is also known that similar to school culture, each classroom has its own ethos and climate which affect teachers' work and students' learning. The classroom environment is described as the setting in which student learning takes place. It concerns the classroom's physical environment, the social system, the atmosphere, norms and values (Creemers & Reezigt, 1999). According to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development's (OECD) report (2009), studies conducted in different regions of the world have shown that classroom climate is one of the most important predictors of student achievement. Classroom discipline, routines (rules), level of interaction, communication and collaboration between students and teachers constitute school culture. Therefore, student teachers who carry out teaching practice in these classrooms are unable to escape the possible effects of classroom culture on their development. In many ways, those effects may be positive as well as negative.

Previous studies have shown that student teachers face some problematic issues during teaching practices (Gök & Sılay, 2004; Aksu & Demirtaş, 2006; Yeşil & Çalışkan, 2006; Demircan, 2007; Erdoğan, Ören, & Sevinç, 2009). Difficulty in classroom management and not being accepted as an actual teacher, but being seen as an assistant of mentors were documented as the most problematic issues by student teachers (Seçer, Çeliköz & Kayılı, 2010; Yeşilyurt & Semerci, 2012). Similarly, student teachers expressed being treated as a student but not a teacher or colleague as the biggest challenge during their teaching practices (Oğuz, 2004; Baştürk, 2009). This situation may lead to the failure to create appropriate classroom conditions for student teachers and may result in the failure to achieve the goals and objectives of teaching practice. Under these conditions, student teachers' practices for professional development will not go beyond role-playing in the classroom or adaptation of existent teaching agreement, which is previously created by the actual teacher of the classroom (namely the mentor) (Baştürk, 2008).

Studies carried out in this field generally concentrated on relationships between mentors and student teachers (Özbek & Aytekin, 2003; Ekiz, 2006b), student teachers' beliefs about mentoring and learning to teach during teaching practice (Wang, 2001; Zanting et al., 2001), use of time effectively in teaching practice (Oral, 1997), and investigated pre-service teachers' greater power to act in the classroom (Moussay, Flavier, Zimmermann & Méard, 2011) and problems encountered during teaching practice (Gök & Sılay 2004; Aksu & Demirtaş, 2006; Yeşil & Çalışkan, 2006; Demircan, 2007; Erdoğan, Ören, & Sevinç, 2009; Yeşilyurt & Semerci, 2012).

Previous studies raised the issue of student teachers' conditions of learning to teach in schools, however, most of them neglected to investigate the actual effects of classroom culture on their professional development. It is believed that aspects such as expressing and establishing authority, effective teaching, understanding and correcting unwanted behavior, creating a positive atmosphere, employing disciplinary actions and fixing problems are associated with the classroom culture (Robertson, 1996) and are affective factors on student teachers' professional development. The teacher of the classroom is responsible for dealing with all these factors and creating an atmosphere in which pupils can learn effectively.

The Context

In Turkey, as elsewhere, teaching practice is considered as a compulsory and core component of a teacher education program in education faculties. According to the Turkish Higher Education Council (Yükseköğretim Kurulu (YÖK), 1998), after successful completion of teaching practice student teachers will be able to

- develop teaching competence through teaching in different classrooms of replaced schools,
- learn the curriculum they teach specifically and interpret how to evaluate students, and
- share personal experiences with peers and faculty members in order for their development (Arslanargun, Kılıç & Acar, 2012).

In the current system in Turkey, primary student teachers (PSTs; trained to teach 6-10 year olds) take two courses at faculties of education in their fourth (final) year leading to a B.Ed. degree, named Teaching Practice–I in the fall semester (14 weeks) and Teaching Practice–II in the spring semester (14 weeks). PSTs are first introduced to schools in the second semester of their 3rd year within the framework of School Experience course. In this course PSTs only observe teachers and pupils in real classrooms one day in a week and are not allowed teaching. However, teaching practice occur in their fourth year only. At Karadeniz Technical University where this study was carried out, final year pre-service teachers are placed in local primary schools as groups (mostly comprised of six to seven PSTs) and carry out their teaching practices in classrooms during a 14 week period. Those groups are assigned to one mentor teacher.

The mentors are generally nominated by the school management to education faculties. Any teacher in a school can apply for a mentorship. Faculty co-ordinator generally accepts school nominated mentor teachers and assign a group of student teachers (6-7 students) to mentors randomly just on the basis of subject specialism. Mentor teachers are given written and verbal instructions about teaching practice procedures at the beginning of semester by the faculty co-ordinator. Feedback of PSTs is one of the effective criteria for selection of mentors. After determination of groups and their mentors, depending on the agreement between mentor and PSTs, the group is divided into two and those small groups (three to four PSTs) go to school and spend one of the appropriate days of the week within the classrooms. The group is divided because it is too large for teaching practice as the presence of six to seven PSTs in the classroom at the same time is assumed to cause too great a distraction for pupils. Thus, a maximum of two or three student teachers are placed in one classroom and while one is carrying out his/her teaching, the other two and the mentor teacher are required to sit at the back of the classroom and observe him/her and take some notes for providing feedback. The other half of the group carries out their teaching practice on another suitable day in the week. Each week, student teachers rotate and take over the classroom by distributing the daily lessons offered by the mentor evenly between themselves. When they go to schools, first they meet with the mentor and decide on the following issues and plan the teaching practice together:

- Which PSTs are teaching on which day (for example, next week)?
- Which lessons will be taught?
- What topics will be taught within these lessons?
- What is the teaching sequence? (For example, who is teaching in the first hour, who is teaching the second hour and after?)

After this meeting, PSTs return to the faculty and make lesson plans, prepare teaching materials and return to school the following week and start their teaching practice for one day. By this time, they are also required to attend seven to eight other courses at the faculty. Until PSTs come to school, the mentor teacher carries out his/her teaching following the standard curriculum. When PSTs come to school, the mentor gives them control of the classroom and instructs them to continue to teach the subjects (topics) from the point where s/he left yesterday, for example. PSTs try to complete the lesson on the basis of directions previously given by the mentor. This procedure is repeated each week. At the end of the semester they are required to teach in classrooms for between 15 to 20 hours under the supervision of the mentor teacher. During the semester, PSTs are also required to have

meetings with the supervising academic at the faculty once in a week in order to discuss any problematic issues that were raised during teaching practice.

In the current context, classroom climate can be described as teacher-centered oriented despite the constructivist curriculum in practice. This approach involves imparting information and transmitting structured knowledge to students (Chen *et al.* 2012). Learning through memorizing, limited teaching and learning materials, exam based education and overcrowded classrooms were reviewed as some of the debated issues in schools recently in Turkey (Yılmaz & Altunkurt, 2011). In this environment, teachers tend to spend most of their efforts in managing classroom and establishing authority and discipline which leads to teacher dominated education. Traditionally, teachers at all levels are expected to establish an authority through creating classroom routines (rules) in order to create better teaching and learning environments in schools. It can be said that teachers in Turkey have more power in classrooms compare to Western countries.

As mentioned earlier within this climate of schools, pre-service teachers come to pre-determined classrooms (determined by the faculty coordinator) for one day a week and spend four to six class hours with the mentor, peers and pupils. A minimum of six student teachers go into the same classroom together; one of them teaches the class while the others, including the mentor, observe him/her. Each week a student teacher teaches two to three class hours and is expected to reach 15-25 hours in total. Given the practice occurs one day a week then the length of practice is equivalent to 14 days in a semester. In this structure, it is assumed that there is a limited opportunity for student teachers to feel fully attached to and be part of the classroom. They may be perceived as temporary teachers on probation. In this environment, it is believed that student teachers have limited power to convey their personal and pedagogical skills in the classroom at their maximum level, as the culture of the classroom (routines, level of interaction and format of the classes e.g. teacher/child centered) is already established by the actual teacher of the classroom.

Aim of the Study

In this vein, this study attempts to explore the possible effects of classroom culture which is previously established by mentor teachers on primary student teachers' (PSTs) professional development during their teaching practices in school placements. It is assumed that the pre-established classroom culture may have limited contribution to PSTs' professional development in terms of establishing authority and creating a positive teaching and learning atmosphere based on their personal qualities within the classroom. Thus, the study sought to find answers to the following questions:

1. How do student teachers' implement classroom routines (e.g. rules, classroom management) which are not created by themselves but previously established by the mentor teacher?
2. How does being seen as a temporary teacher affect student teachers' motivation to teach in the classroom?
3. Are student teachers' able to shape the classroom on the basis of their personal qualities?

Method

The current study utilized both quantitative and qualitative research methods (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Cohen & Manion, 2000; Cresswell, 2003) throughout the data collection and analysis processes. It is argued that the use of both methods provides a more complete understanding of research problems than does the use of either approach alone (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008, p. 557). In other words, the combination of methods from both approaches would generate complementary results that would add greater breadth and depth to the analysis than either one could generate on its own (Patton, 1990). The study was designed within the case study (Stake, 1995) framework and carried out during the spring semester of the 2011-2012 academic year in which PSTs were required to fulfill their teaching practices in assigned schools.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Initially, a questionnaire developed by the author was distributed to 190 final year (4th year) PSTs towards the end of the semester. The questionnaire aimed to obtain preliminary data regarding how student teachers evaluate the whole process of teaching practice and to identify the initial problems faced concerning the classroom culture. The *Teaching Practice Evaluation Questionnaire* (TPEQ) consisted of a Likert-type scale (5 scaled) and a total of 50 items, categorized under six dimensions of teaching practice: communication and collaboration with mentor (10 items); teaching process (14 items); classroom management (routines) (4 items); classroom culture (9 items); collaboration with faculty coordinator (8 items); and professional development (5 items). The questionnaire was designed for the evaluation of teaching practice holistically, however, in this study 21 items related to classroom culture and professional development of student teachers were used only for data analysis. As can be seen from the Table 1 (below), items from A25 to A37 are related to classroom culture and rest of them are related to professional development. Cronbach's reliability coefficient was calculated to be .88 for the entire questionnaire. In the calculation of this coefficient, negative items on the questionnaire were reversed in scoring. Moreover, in order to increase the validity and reliability of the questionnaire; views of two academics at the same department were consulted. After agreeing on the content, a pool of items were created and a piloted on 20 student teachers from Pre-school Education Programme. Readability and comprehensibility of items were checked and revisions were made on items of the draft questionnaire. Grammatical structure of items was checked by two academics who work in the Turkish Teaching Department. After these validity and reliability processes, the final draft of the questionnaire were designed and applied to PSTs.

During the analysis process, 12 questionnaires were disregarded due to incompleteness and a total of 178 questionnaires were used for the actual data analysis. One hundred and five (59%) female and 73 (41%) male student teachers responded to the questionnaire. From this total, 13 PSTs (7.3%) taught in 1st grade, 26 (14.6%) PSTs in 2nd grade, 44 (24.7%) PSTs in 3rd grade, 62 (34.8%) PSTs in 4th grade and 33 (18.5%) PSTs carried out their teaching practices in 5th grade classes. In Turkey 1st grade classes comprise 7 years, 2nd grades 8 years, 3rd grades 9 years, 4th grades 10 years and 5th grades involve 11 years old pupils.

In the analysis of the questionnaire, frequencies, percentages and mean scores were calculated and presented only in tables.

After the questionnaire analysis, 15 volunteer PSTs were randomly selected to participate in face-to-face interviews. A semi-structured interview form, which included 12 open-ended questions, was designed by the author and conducted with the student teachers after the completion of teaching practices. The conversations were tape-recorded and

subsequently transcribed. In order to increase the validity and reliability of semi-structured interviews, expert views were taken before the interviews from two academics who work in the Turkish Teaching Department in order to check the comprehensibility of the questions in terms of their linguistic construction. In addition, the semi-structured interview form was carried out with five student teachers from the department of pre-school teaching program as a means of a pilot study. After that process, questions which were not understood by the interviewees were re-formed and the final draft of the form was generated and utilized during the actual interviews.

Interview data were analyzed through the use of “constant comparison method” aimed to reach generic categories across the cases (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the interview analysis, thematic classifications and categories were initially generated from the conversation transcripts, and were then presented in tables. Direct quotations from the conversations were also presented in a narrative way in order to support the data illustrated in tables and questionnaire findings where appropriate.

Findings

Analysis of Preliminary Questionnaire Data

As mentioned in the method section, in the study a preliminary questionnaire was applied to student teachers in order to determine whether PSTs have faced any problems in relation to classroom culture during their teaching practices. Table 1 below presents the responses of PSTs to 21 items which are formed to obtain their initial views on classroom culture through the preliminary questionnaire.

| Item No | Items | Never | | Rarely | | Some-times | | Often | | Always | | Mean X |
|---------|---|-------|------|--------|------|------------|------|-------|------|--------|------|--------|
| | | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | n | % | |
| A2 | <i>The mentor has intervened in my teaching during the lessons</i> | 69 | 38,8 | 64 | 36,0 | 27 | 15,2 | 12 | 6,7 | 6 | 3,4 | 2,01 |
| A3 | <i>I needed to be directed by the mentor during my teaching</i> | 91 | 51,1 | 72 | 40,4 | 14 | 7,9 | 1 | 0,6 | 0 | 0 | 1,58 |
| A4 | <i>The mentor's interventions were affecting my motivation in a negative way</i> | 68 | 38,2 | 26 | 14,6 | 31 | 17,4 | 24 | 13,5 | 29 | 16,3 | 2,58 |
| A10 | <i>I was not able to act naturally due to the presence of the mentor in the classroom</i> | 72 | 40,4 | 52 | 29,2 | 27 | 15,2 | 17 | 9,6 | 10 | 5,6 | 2,12 |
| A21 | <i>It was hard to carry on teaching a topic that was previously taught but left at one point by the mentor</i> | 35 | 19,7 | 43 | 24,2 | 59 | 33,1 | 26 | 14,6 | 15 | 8,4 | 2,69 |
| A25 | <i>I was comfortable with applying sanctions towards unwanted behaviors within the classroom</i> | 7 | 3,9 | 34 | 19,1 | 61 | 34,3 | 52 | 29,2 | 24 | 13,5 | 3,29 |
| A26 | <i>I was able to create and apply my own rules in the classroom</i> | 10 | 5,6 | 39 | 21,9 | 40 | 22,5 | 57 | 32,0 | 32 | 18,0 | 3,35 |
| A27 | <i>I was able to establish my authority without the presence of the mentor</i> | 1 | 0,6 | 7 | 3,9 | 43 | 24,2 | 79 | 44,4 | 48 | 27,0 | 3,93 |
| A28 | <i>I ignored most of the unwanted behaviors because the classroom did not belong to me</i> | 59 | 33,1 | 68 | 38,2 | 33 | 18,5 | 17 | 9,6 | 1 | 0,6 | 2,07 |
| A30 | <i>I was able to raise my voice when necessary and be angry with pupils during my teaching</i> | 10 | 5,6 | 31 | 17,4 | 57 | 32,0 | 55 | 30,9 | 25 | 14,0 | 3,30 |
| A31 | <i>I was able to comfortably make jokes to pupils during my teaching</i> | 3 | 1,7 | 15 | 8,4 | 50 | 28,1 | 60 | 33,7 | 50 | 28,1 | 3,79 |
| A33 | <i>I have established an effective communication with pupils.</i> | 1 | 0,6 | 3 | 1,7 | 12 | 6,7 | 94 | 52,8 | 68 | 38,2 | 4,26 |
| A34 | <i>Pupils did not treat me as their actual teacher</i> | 38 | 21,3 | 60 | 33,7 | 38 | 21,3 | 32 | 18,0 | 10 | 5,6 | 2,53 |
| A35 | <i>Pre-established classroom culture has affected me in a negative way.</i> | 48 | 27,0 | 50 | 28,1 | 55 | 30,9 | 19 | 10,7 | 6 | 3,4 | 2,35 |
| A36 | <i>Teaching for a few hours in a week was preventing me from adapting myself to the classroom like a real teacher</i> | 32 | 18,0 | 53 | 29,8 | 52 | 29,2 | 33 | 18,5 | 8 | 4,5 | 2,62 |
| A37 | <i>Pupils in my class behaved differently when the mentor was not in the classroom.</i> | 15 | 8,4 | 41 | 23,0 | 53 | 29,8 | 37 | 20,8 | 32 | 18,0 | 3,17 |
| A38 | <i>I would have preferred to be alone in the class when I was teaching</i> | 6 | 3,4 | 18 | 10,1 | 39 | 21,9 | 40 | 22,5 | 75 | 42,1 | 3,91 |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------|---|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-------------|
| A39 | <i>The presence of my peers in the class during my teaching gave me confidence</i> | 34 | 19,1 | 36 | 20,2 | 57 | 32,0 | 38 | 21,3 | 13 | 7,3 | 2,78 |
| A41 | <i>The presence of the mentor and my peers in the class disrupted the nature of the classroom</i> | 35 | 19,7 | 46 | 27,5 | 43 | 24,2 | 26 | 14,6 | 25 | 14,0 | 2,76 |
| A42 | <i>Due to feeling like a temporary teacher I could not carry out a lot of activities in the class</i> | 70 | 39,3 | 52 | 29,2 | 35 | 19,7 | 17 | 9,6 | 4 | 2,2 | 2,06 |
| A46 | <i>I think that I have improved myself professionally with the help of teaching practice</i> | 2 | 1,1 | 7 | 3,9 | 17 | 9,6 | 60 | 33,7 | 92 | 51,7 | 4,31 |

Table 1: Responses of PSTs to questionnaire items.

Table 1 indicates 178 PSTs' responses concerning the effects of classroom culture on their professional development. Various effects can be observed from the table. In their responses, PSTs generally had positive views regarding classroom culture during their teaching practices. It is evident that the mentor's interventions were not seen as a disruptive effect by student teachers (A2; A4; A10); however, the majority of PSTs (Never=91+Rarely=72 $\Sigma n=163$) responded that they did not need the mentors' directions during their instruction (A3), which means that they felt very confident in their teaching. In addition, item A39 is investigated it can be seen that for many of PSTs the presence of peers in the class was encouraging (Sometimes=57 + Often=38 + Always=13, $\Sigma n=110$), but the presence of both peers and the mentor together in the class was perceived as a disruptive factor in terms of the nature of classroom environment (Sometimes=43 + Often=26 + Always=25 $\Sigma n=94$) (A41). The latter view was also clearly reflected in item A38 where the great majority of PSTs ($n=149$) responded that they would feel more comfortable if they were left alone with pupils in the classroom when they were teaching.

The preliminary data suggest that PSTs did not have much difficulty in terms of classroom management. For instance, most of them pointed out that they were able to use sanctions for unwanted behaviors in the class (Sometimes=61 + Often=52 + Always=24, $\Sigma n=137$) (A25); they were confident in raising their voice against students when necessary despite the presence of the mentor (Sometimes=57 + Often=55 + Always=25, $\Sigma n=137$) (A30); they were able to generate their own classroom routines and apply them (Sometimes=40 + Often=57 + Always=32 $\Sigma n=129$) (A26); the great majority of them were able to establish their own authority during their teaching periods (Sometimes=43 + Often=79 + Always=48 $\Sigma n=170$) (A27) and were able to create good communication with pupils (Sometimes=50 + Often=60 + Always=50 $\Sigma n=160$) (A31), i.e., making jokes to them comfortably (A33). Despite PSTs' positive views about classroom management in general, when item A37 is examined a contradiction in their views is realized as most of them (sometimes=53, often=37 and always=32, $\Sigma n=122$) responded that pupils' behaviors changed when the mentor was not in the classroom, which may be regarded as the PSTs' lack of classroom control without the presence of actual teacher in the class. In order to answer the question "how were pupils behaving differently?" a more in-depth investigation was needed. To investigate the deep-rooted issues that emerged in the preliminary questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with PSTs were planned and carried out.

With regard to item A34, "not being seen as an actual teacher by pupils", PSTs' views are almost divided in half as 98 responded Never ($n=38$) and Rarely ($n=60$) and the rest of them (nearly half $n=80$) felt that they were seen as temporary teachers by pupils in the classroom. This issue was examined further in the interviews. In fact, when item A36 is examined it can be understood that due to limited teaching hours, most of the PSTs ($n=93$) were unable to adapt themselves to the classroom environment as an actual teacher. Nevertheless, the majority of them ($n=122$) tried their best to carry out their planned activities in the classroom and did not ignore any teaching-learning activities despite some of the PSTs ($n=80$) feeling like temporary teachers. In addition, most of PSTs (A35, $n=98$) did not

perceive the “pre-established classroom culture” - a main focus of the study - as an inhibiting factor for their teaching practices, despite the rest of them (n=80) responding that the pre-established classroom culture affected their classroom teaching in a negative way. Finally, it can be seen from item A46 that despite the pros and cons of teaching practice applications, for the great majority of PSTs (n=169) this experience had a positive impact on their professional development (A46).

Preliminary questionnaire data analysis reveals that, despite some optimistic responses, the classroom environment where PSTs carried out their teaching practice influences their professional development in many ways. Questionnaire data indicates that student teachers faced some problematic issues such as the presence of the mentor and peers in the class, pupils changing behaviors, insufficient adaptation to the classroom and the feeling of being a temporary teacher, which directed the author to collect some qualitative data in order to further investigate these issues. Particularly, to obtain a more complete understanding of the effects of classroom environment on PSTs’ professional development, face-to-face interviews were organized and carried out with some randomly selected volunteer PSTs who also responded to the preliminary questionnaire. In this way, the author of the study was able to find out whether the questionnaire findings and interview data supported, completed or contradicted each other.

Interview Findings

For the interviews, 15 volunteer PSTs were randomly selected. In the preliminary questionnaire, a blank box was left for PSTs to check if they would like to participate in the interview. Fifty-three checked the box and 18 were contacted, but due to some timing and space constraints only 15 were interviewed. Table 2 presents the demographic information for the interviewed PSTs.

| PST Code | Gender | Grade Taught | Teaching Practice Duration (hours) |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------|---|
| PST1 | F | 3 rd Grade | 15 |
| PST2 | F | 2 nd Grade | 15 |
| PST3 | M | 2 nd Grade | 15 |
| PST4 | M | 3 rd Grade | 18 |
| PST5 | F | 3 rd Grade | 20 |
| PST6 | M | 3 rd Grade | 18 |
| PST7 | F | 3 rd Grade | 15 |
| PST8 | M | 3 rd Grade | 24 |
| PST9 | M | 2 nd Grade | 17 |
| PST10 | F | 3 rd Grade | 17 |
| PST11 | F | 2 nd Grade | 15 |
| PST12 | M | 3 rd Grade | 15 |
| PST13 | F | 1 st Grade | 15 |
| PST14 | F | 2 nd Grade | 18 |
| PST15 | F | 3 rd Grade | 22 |

Table 2: Demographic information for interviewed PSTs

As illustrated in Table 2, interview participants were mostly female PSTs and the majority of them were assigned to teach in the 3rd grade (9 years old) classes. It can be observed from the Table that all of the participants have fulfilled the required duration of teaching practices (15-25 hours) in assigned classrooms.

Similar to the preliminary questionnaire, the interviewed student teachers were asked whether the mentor teacher was in the class during their teaching activities and it was

revealed that in most cases mentors were present in the class while PSTs were teaching (PST13, PST15 said “sometimes”; PST1, PST8, PST10, PST12 said “generally” and PSTs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11 said that the mentor was “always” in the class). They were also probed in the interview concerning whether or not the presence of the mentor affected their teaching. Responses were categorized as positive, negative and neutral.

| Views | PSTs | f |
|----------|-----------------------|---|
| Positive | 1, 5, 10, 11 | 4 |
| Negative | 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 13, 14 | 7 |
| Neutral | 2, 8, 12, 15 | 4 |

Table 3: PSTs’ views about effects of the presence of the mentor in the class

It was revealed in PSTs’ conversations that for some, the presence of the mentor in the class had positive effects on their development. These views were reflected in the following quotations:

“I taught the lessons as if he was not there. I felt nothing negative about his presence...” (PST1).

“He always approached me with a respect as if I was one of his colleagues” (PST10).

“I was so comfortable in terms of classroom management, because my mentor was always there with me” (PST11).

“He was helping me out when I got stuck at some points, which was so beneficial for me” (PST5).

On the other hand, the majority of PSTs indicated that the presence of the mentor had some negative effects on their teaching experiences in the classrooms. Views of some PSTs are presented as follows:

“During my teaching, he was asking me questions as if he was checking my knowledge about the topics I teach. This led me to feel as if I am inadequate” (PST4).

“I think that I was not natural as I am in my normal life during the times when the mentor was in the class” (PST9).

“I was always anxious about whether s/he will like my activities or not in the class...” (PST2).

“When he was in the class I felt that he was in charge of the classroom all the time not me...” (PST7).

“When pupils were responding to my questions they were always looking at the mentor’s eyes as if they were expecting an approval from him” (PST14).

“I felt that my role in the class was teaching the topic only and do nothing else...” (PST7).

“...once pupils got noisy, the mentor has directly shouted at them to make them quiet without waiting for my reaction. This prevented me from developing my skills in classroom management for example, and in such cases I felt deteriorated in front of the class and it was also effecting my communication with pupils in a negative way” (PST6).

In the questionnaire, PSTs’ positive views were echoed with regard to the presence of the mentor; however, when their interview conversations were analyzed it was revealed that this sort of arrangement during teaching practices caused various problems for PSTs. Perhaps inadequate communications between the mentors and student teachers, not knowing each other well and sharing very little time together are some of the sources of student teachers’ anxiety during their teaching practices.

As previously explained, PSTs teach up to 25 hours during a semester and are required to be in the school one day per week. PSTs perceived this amount of time as insufficient. In their conversations they mentioned that the very limited time spent in the school caused them to be seen as temporary teachers by pupils and other teachers. Hence, during the interviews the following question was asked: *“How is being seen as a temporary teacher affecting your motivation?”* For most of interviewed PSTs (n=12) this fact was affecting their motivation in a negative way. For instance, PST7 commented that *“Of course it affected my motivation. We’re even not seen as temporary teachers. It was obvious from when pupils were calling us “sisters” because we were constantly warned by teachers in front of the eyes of pupils. And this made pupils think that we know nothing about teaching. So they were not respecting to us and we’re not able to establish an authority within the class”*. Similar views were also expressed by other PSTs. In addition, PST9, PST10 and PST15 emphasized that the feeling of being a temporary teacher was lowering their intrinsic motivation during teaching practices.

Results of the study also indicate that developing classroom management skills during teaching practices was one of the problematic elements for PSTs’ professional development. Creating classroom routines (e.g. rules) and observing them is one of the crucial elements for creating an effective teaching and learning environment within the classroom. As explained earlier, PSTs carry out teaching practices for a few hours in classrooms where routines and the atmosphere of the classrooms are established by others (meaning the actual teacher, who might have traditional teaching characteristics). In the interviews PSTs were asked *“Due to pre-established routines and classroom ethos where there any situations (your own rules for example that you did not apply) or teaching/learning activities (you have planned in your way) that you have passed over during your teaching practices?”* In the responses it was revealed that except for PST5 and PST6, the majority of PSTs pointed out that this had happened. For instance, PST15 stated that *“...there were classroom routines which were previously generated by the actual classroom teacher. Whenever I wanted to direct pupils according to my rules then there was a chaos in the class”*. Similarly PST11 commented that *“I was so careful to observe the routines created by the real teacher...”*. PST3 mentioned that *“...If the class was belonging to me, with different activities I would create a classroom environment where pupils feel more confident, happy and free...”*. On the other hand, PST13 pointed out that *“You cannot change too many things in the class because the classroom is not yours and you are there for a limited time. Sometimes I have ignored some routines but I have never compromised on the learning activities that had to be done...”*.

During the interviews, PSTs were also asked, within this context, how they adapted themselves to classrooms during their teaching practices: *“Were you able to shape the classroom according to your personal qualities or have you shaped yourself according to pre-established classroom culture?”* Responses of PSTs are summarized in Table 4, below.

| Question: Were you able to shape the classroom according to your personal qualities or have you shaped yourself according to pre-established classroom culture? | | |
|--|--|---------------------|
| Categories | Indications/Comments | PST codes |
| I shaped my-self according to the classroom | <i>"Because each semester we do our teaching practices in different schools"</i> | PST1 |
| | <i>"Limited time allocation for participating in teaching practice"</i> | PST2 |
| | <i>"Attitude and pressure exhibited by the mentor"</i> | PST3, PST4, PST7 |
| | <i>"Pre-established classroom routines"</i> | PST6, PST7, PST14 |
| | <i>"Futility of the effort to change the classroom environment"</i> | PST2, PST6 |
| The classroom has been shaped according to me | <i>"Supportive attitude of the mentor and warm classroom climate"</i> | PST5 |
| Balanced | <i>"Both sides have compromised on certain issues"</i> | PST12, PST13, PST15 |

Table 4: PSTs' views on shaping the classroom.

Table 4 illustrates that most of the PSTs had to adapt themselves according to classroom cultures. Time limitation, feeling under pressure and pre-created routines were inhibiting factors for PSTs' attempts to shape the classroom by putting their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge into practice. For some, even trying to change something in the class was pointless due to the feeling of being a temporary teacher. PST2 commented that *"I have shaped myself according to the classroom, because I was there for a temporary time, and it would be meaningless to try to re-shape the classroom"*. Similarly, PST6 expressed that *"I could not shape them. I haven't tried even to do this, in fact we had not had this sort of opportunity and environment. They [the class] had certain routines and functioning built in 2 years, so I have acted according to class, pupils and the teacher"*. Only PST5 commented that she was able to try to change something in the classrooms in parallel with personal will. She expressed that *"... due to the modest and tolerant climate of the class (including both pupils and the mentor) I was able to act freely throughout my teaching activities..."*.

Finally, after completion of teaching practice processes, PSTs were asked to explain what they think about the contribution of teaching practice in these classrooms on their professional development. Table 5 below summarizes the responses of the interviewed PSTs.

| Question: Do you think that teaching in classrooms where culture was established previously (beforehand) contributed to your professional development? | | |
|---|-------------|--|
| ANSWERS | PSTs | Comments |
| YES | PST5 | <i>"I taught as if the mentor was not there. At the end of the class he was always providing feed-back"</i> |
| | PST8 | <i>"I think that for me it was so beneficial. Constant feed-back and being informed about pupils by the mentor have made our job easier"</i> |
| | PST11 | <i>"Contributed. One day if I had my own classroom I think I will try to do similar activities as my mentor teacher does"</i> |
| | PST13 | <i>"Influencing on or changing something in pre-established cultures is very difficult. We were able to see what can we do when we face this"</i> |
| PARTLY | PST3 | <i>"Handing over a classroom fully to our authorization depends on our development however, it can be changed according to the mentor's trust towards the student teacher"</i> |
| | PST12 | <i>"It is beneficial in terms of giving a lesson in front of a class and overcoming the excitement but I do not think that it is beneficial in terms of gaining classroom control skills where rules are created previously by someone else"</i> |
| | PST1 | <i>"Classroom routines were halted during our teaching practices. So we could not even fully maintain the existing routines"</i> |
| | PST2 | <i>"When we arrived to classrooms pupils' behavioral characteristics were already improved"</i> |

| | | |
|----|-------|---|
| NO | PST4 | <i>"The students of this school, I saw only obey. I was one of the persons during class activities who was running around doing errands"</i> |
| | PST6 | <i>"We were going to school preparing ourselves just to the lesson we're required to teach. Under pressure and interventions of the mentor teacher I could not even feel myself as a teacher"</i> |
| | PST7 | <i>"You are trying to give something to pupils who are accustomed to a certain class order and this prevents you from developing your own teaching style"</i> |
| | PST9 | <i>"...It was like readymade. I do not think this application was practical enough..."</i> |
| | PST10 | <i>"This does not provide any development for me because I enter in to a readymade classroom"</i> |
| | PST14 | <i>"There is no gain for us by obeying previously created rules where classroom order has already been set"</i> |
| | PST15 | <i>"Seven different persons enter to one same class in a week every time and each one of us has different methods, different routines and different styles"</i> |

Table 5: PSTs' views about the impact of pre-formed classroom culture on their professional development

As demonstrated in Table 5, the interview responses of the PSTs concerning the contribution of teaching practice on their professional development vary on the basis of personal experiences. Most of the PSTs (n=8) pointed out that being in a classroom where the mentor is in charge generally has little benefits for PSTs' development in terms of gaining classroom management skills and establishing their own authority. They often felt under pressure due to the presence of the mentor and were not able to put their knowledge into practice. Despite some positive views, due to certain constraints such as time limitation, mentors interventions and pre-created classroom ethos, teaching practice experience was found to be less effective for their professional development.

Furthermore, despite some parallelisms, in most instances the questionnaire responses and interview responses contradict each other. PSTs' complementary and contradictory views are discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the possible effects of classroom culture on student teachers' professional development. First of all, findings of the study offer clear evidence that there is a relationship between classroom climate and student teachers' professional development. The analysis of the questionnaire and interview data illustrate that carrying out teaching practices in classrooms where culture is already created according to actual teachers' personal and professional strategies has some degree of contribution to PSTs' professional development. This finding corroborates with Cabrera and La Nasa's (2002, p. 26) conclusion that classroom climate/culture *is as important for student learning and development as is teaching*.

Working with mentors and colleagues (peers) is an important component of teaching practice. In this study it was revealed that according to participant pre-service teachers, a collaborative and informal learning climate in classrooms is yet to be created; these teaching conditions can increase opportunities for learning and can also add to the enjoyment of the activity (Kennedy, 2011). Results suggest that the presence of peers in classrooms during the teaching practices of pre-service teachers is encouraging, as is the presence of a mentor teacher in the class. Provision of constant feedback, being a role model and being informative were perceived by some of the participants as contributory effects of a mentor on the student teachers' professional development (Hudson, 2010). On the other hand, the findings of this

study offer similar evidence to the findings of previous studies (Wang, 2000; Gökçe & Demirhan, 2005; Ekiz, 2006a; Baştürk, 2008; Hudson, 2010), that mentors are not always successful in creating conditions for effective student teacher learning. A mentor's direct intervention in the class without waiting for the PST's reaction was seen as one of the most important inhibiting factors for PSTs' professional development. In this case it can be concluded that there is an unshared understanding between mentors and PSTs on the application of teaching practice in classrooms. A similar finding was echoed in a recent study (Ekiz, 2006a), namely that lack of support from mentors due to the limited time spent by student teachers in schools (Turgut, Yılmaz & Firuzan, 2008) caused a limited sharing of knowledge and experience between the two parts.

In the present study, the vagueness of pre-service teachers' status in practiced classrooms emerged as another critical issue in terms of their professional development. Results of the study appear to suggest that mentors' and pupils' perceptions of PSTs as temporary practitioners led student teachers to confuse their roles in the classrooms. This finding is supported in a previous study carried out by Erdoğan et al. (2009) in which uncertainty of role description, not being taken seriously and not being regarded as a real teacher (Kyriacou & Stephens, 1999) by mentors were problematic issues raised by student teachers during their school experiences. In a similar study, it was revealed that student teachers' top expectations from teaching practice were to be seen as a colleague and a stakeholder by the school and the mentor teachers (Sağ, 2008). Being perceived as a temporary teacher by the school management and mentors makes student teachers' jobs more difficult in terms of establishing effective communication with pupils. In this context, student teachers will only adapt themselves to the existing teaching agreement pre-established by actual teachers of practice schools (Baştürk, 2008).

Initial training is a starting point for a teacher and his/her career-long professional development. Professional competence is regarded as a crucial factor in classroom and school practices (OECD, 2009). In the current context, student teachers are expected to bring their pedagogical knowledge to the classroom during their instructional practices. However, effective instruction is not only associated with student teachers' personal backgrounds (i.e. academic achievement, beliefs, attitudes) but it is also related to contextual variables in classrooms (i.e. mentor's personality, climate, resources, routines). In this study, PSTs' personal backgrounds were not examined but the effects of contextual variables on their teaching practices were clearly identified. The results of the study indicate that student teachers try to adapt their teaching practices to a pre-created classrooms ethos. There is no further evidence to indicate whether student teachers adapt their teaching practices to students' social, psychological, grade level, achievement level and class size, as is reported in the OECD's TALIS report (OECD, 2009). However, the current study determined that participant student teachers shape their teaching characteristics according to the characteristics of the mentor and the classroom as a whole. This is debatable in terms of whether this sort of practice contributes to the initial training of teachers and their professional development. Results of the study show that, according to most of interviewed PSTs, teaching in classrooms where culture has been established for years by the mentor has little contribution to their development of teaching abilities and skills.

Perhaps observation of PSTs in classrooms during their teaching practices would provide more in-depth analysis about their adaptation to classroom culture. This can be regarded as one of the limitations of the present study. Through the classroom observations, there would be an opportunity to find out how student teachers shape their teaching practices in their instructional activities on the basis of classroom routines, pupil characteristics and mentor's directions and interventions. It is therefore suggested that longitudinal studies with groups of student teachers, which includes classroom observations, should be carried out in order to investigate their strategies in coping with the difficulties of adapting to pre-created classroom cultures.

The results of the study have some implications for teacher education institutions and partner schools in Turkey and elsewhere. The findings about pre-service teachers' professional development reported here may contribute to the development of advanced teaching practices which is debatable in Turkish education faculties but have been employed in the Western countries. It is recommended that procedures of teaching practices should be re-examined and re-structured in order to obtain more productive outcomes in terms of student teachers' professional development. Firstly, the duration of student teachers' presence in the classroom should be extended, rather than being in a class one day in a week. As in the UK's Post-graduate Certificate Education (PGCE), student teachers should be given more opportunities (more time with pupils, flexibility, freedom in the class) to act as a real teacher in practice schools. The number of courses they take at the faculty in the last semester should be lessened (or should be removed completely) and they should be allocated to stay in schools during the whole semester (14 weeks) in order to make student teachers feel fully integrated in schools and classrooms. Secondly, a shared vision and understanding between faculty and school management and mentors should be created in order to ensure schools are learning communities and places for student teachers. Finally, student teachers' reflections on personal teaching practices in different contexts should be taken by the faculty as the main source of data for future arrangements of teaching practices in schools. This may make a contribution to professional development and teaching improvement. In this way pre-service teachers may be able to reflect and discover their own conceptions of excellent teaching that have been shaping their daily teaching (Chen *et al.*, 2012). The findings of the current study may also alert researchers and policymakers to design and implement effective professional development programs which could result in changes in primary pre-service teachers' conceptions about classroom culture that may contribute to improve their actual teaching practices.

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